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NEA/ARP FOR JACKSON, BAGWELL; STATE PLS PASS TO FHWA

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELTN](#) [EINV](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS DISCUSSES FHWA  
COOPERATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

REF: KUWAIT 430

¶1. On 25 April, Ambassador met with new Minister of Public Works (MPW) and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Moussa Hussein Abdullah Al-Sarraf to congratulate him on his appointment (reftel) and discuss his priorities. The Minister asked the Ambassador to encourage the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to more rapidly detail more consultants to Kuwait to work with the Ministry to help plan and manage major road projects while training Ministry personnel to develop these competencies. There are currently three FHWA consultants in Kuwait, and the Minister would like to have about ten. Al-Sarraf acknowledged that he had received FHWA Administrator Capka's letter of congratulations dated April 17, and added that he himself had worked closely with FHWA engineers in Kuwait some years ago on the initial development of Kuwait's highway network. The Minister said he hoped to see cooperation between the FHWA and MPW rise to the level he had experienced during that period.

¶2. Al-Sarraf explained that the MPW is responsible for roads, buildings, and mega-projects (including construction of a major container port on Bubiyan island, touristic development on Failaka island, construction of the "Silk City" commercial and residential city in Subiyya, and construction of a 40-km causeway across Kuwait Bay to connect Kuwait City and Subiyya). The Kuwait Municipality, which Al-Sarraf also oversees, is responsible for urban planning, land allocation and permitting. The Planning Ministry, which currently falls under the responsibility of Finance Minister Bader Al-Humaidhi, is responsible for surveys, statistics, and budget oversight related to development projects. Al-Sarraf said he was pleased to now have both the Municipality and Public Works under his responsibility since this should help to reduce unnecessary bureaucratic delays and interagency friction (and his long experience at the municipality will help.) He was also pleased to have the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) separated from his portfolio since PAHW, which is primarily responsible for assigning public housing to citizens, has little direct involvement in development planning and project management.

¶3. The Minister said his priorities included: 1) Securing Parliamentary approval for the Public Private Partnership Law (also known as the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) law) and the Public Properties Law, 2) Increasing public confidence in the MPW and Municipality following numerous allegations of corruption, and 3) Improving the public contracting process to rationalize roles and responsibilities, reduce red tape, and improve coordination between government officials, consultants, and contractors. Al-Sarraf said that progress on most of the mega-projects would have to await passage of the BOT law and Public Properties law.

¶4. When asked by the Ambassador about the challenges of recruiting qualified civil engineers, the Minister said that

engineering graduates from Kuwait University were technically competent but frequently lacked the practical experience and English language skills that would allow them to perform most effectively. He said he hoped to focus on mentoring and training programs for young engineers and suggested that this was another area in which FHWA consultants could play a useful role.

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LeBaron